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ABSTRACT

More than 600 colleges and universities responded to a survey designed to determine the status of business communication education and to seek the opinions of business communication faculty on content emphasis and supplementary materials for an introductory business communication course. Survey results indicated that business communication instruction is an extensive offering in postsecondary schools. Two-thirds of the schools required a business communication course, while less than one-third required business English. Respondents indicated that in an introductory course the most emphasis should be given to communication fundamentals, letters and memos, and report writing, and the least emphasis given to communication theory and technology, organizational and oral communication, and related topics such as ethics and intercultural and nonverbal communication. While there was considerable agreement on the appropriate content emphasis for an introductory business communication course, there was a wide variation in instructional materials as indicated by the more than 100 textbooks used. The results also showed that microcomputers will play an increasing role in business communication in the future. (HTH)

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RESEARCH ON CONTENT OF THE BASIC BUSINESS COMMUNICATION COURSE (AND RELATED ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

Two-thirds of the 622 schools responding to a fall 1983 business communication survey of post-secondary schools required a business communication course. Less than one-third of these schools required business English. Business communication was offered most frequently at the sophomore level. Respondents indicated that in a first course in business communication the most emphasis should be given to communication fundamentals, letters and memos, and report writing. The respondents believed the least emphasis should be given to communication theory, organizational communication, oral communication, communication technology, and related topics (ethics, non-verbal communication, and intercultural communication).

INTRODUCTION

During fall 1983 a business communication survey of 4,658 post-secondary schools was conducted. The purposes of this survey were as follows:

1. To determine the status of business communication.

2. To seek the opinions of business communication faculty members on content emphasis and supplementary materials for a first course in business communication.

South-Western Publishing Company facilitated the survey by printing the questionnaires and mailing them to the post-secondary schools on its mailing list.

A copy of the survey instrument is shown in the Appendix.

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SURVEY RESPONDENTS

There were 622 respondents to the census survey. As shown in Table I, the four major categories of post-secondary schools were represented.

Table I. Business Communication Survey Responses

Type of School	Number of Questionnaires Mailed	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
Community/Junior Colleges	1009	206	33.1%
Four-Year Colleges/ Universities	1342	203	32.6%
Post-Secondary Vocational Schools	606	59	9.5%
Private Business Colleges/ Schools	1701	103	16.6%
Other	0	51	8.2%
Total	4658	622	100.0%

The survey results presented in this report are based on the 622 responses represented in Table I. Inferences from these data may have some unintentional bias due to the non-random nature of the sample in this census survey; however, the size and proportional representation of the response received provides informative data. A summary analysis of the detailed data secured appears in this report.

FINDINGS

The findings of the survey reveal for the respondent schools the status of business communication instruction and related information.

Types of Schools

Approximately one-third of the respondents represented Community/ Junior Colleges, one third represented Four-Year Colleges/Universities, and one-third represented Post-Secondary Vocational Schools, Private Business Colleges/Schools, and an "Other" category.

Enrollments

One half (53.2 percent) of the respondent schools had enrollments of less than 2,000 students. The other half of the schools' enrollment was distributed from 2,000 to 5,000 or more students. Over 20 percent of the schools had enrollments of 5,000 or more students.

Business Communication Requirement

About two-thirds (64.1 percent) of the schools required a business communication course. Another 13.2 percent offered business communication on an elective basis. While the percentages of schools requiring a business communication course ranged from 59.6 percent for Four-Year Colleges/Universities to 72.9 percent for Post-Secondary Vocational Schools, there appeared to be no significant differences among the types of schools as to the percentage requiring a course.

Business Communication Enrollments

Average annual enrollments in the business communication courses ranged from less than 50 students to over 3,000 students. More than half of the schools (53.7 percent) had average annual enrollments of less than 50, two-thirds (68.5 percent) had less than 100, one-fourth (26.5 percent) between 200 and 750, and five percent had enrollments over 750.

Business Communication Textbooks Used

Some 121 different business communication textbooks were used by the schools responding to the survey. Those textbooks with more than 2.5 percent of the total adoptions were as follows:

Robertson and Perkins, Effective Correspondence for Colleges
Himstreet and Baty, Business Communications
Lesikar, Basic Business Communication
Wolf, Keyser, and Aurner, Effective Communication in Business
Stewart and Zimmer, College English and Communication
Murphy and Peck, Effective Business Communication
Sigband and Bateman, Communicating Through Letters
Wilkinson, Clarke, and Wilkinson, Communicating Through Letters and Reports
Poe and Fruehling, Business Communication: A Problem Solving Approach
Treece, Communication for Business and the Professions

The listed textbooks account for about one-half (48.3 percent) of the total adoptions.

Business English Requirement

Less than one-third (29.7 percent) of the respondent schools required a business English course. Another 5.1 percent of the schools offered business English on an elective basis.

Four-Year Colleges/Universities (5.9 percent) were the least likely to require business English, whereas Post-Secondary Vocational Schools (57.6 percent) and Private Business Colleges/Schools (67.0 percent) were most likely to require such a course. About one-fourth of the Community/Junior Colleges (27.7 percent) required business English.

Business English Enrollments

In the schools that offered business English courses, the enrollments were relatively low. Over three-fourths of the schools offering business English had average annual enrollments of less than 50 students. Almost all the schools had annual enrollments less than 500.

Business English Textbooks Used

Some 77 different business English textbooks were used by the respondent schools. Of these 77, only four textbooks were each adopted by more than 2.5 percent of the schools which responded. These four textbooks, which account for a total of 39.6 percent of all adoptions, are the following:

Barry, Business English for the 80's
Burtness, Effective English for Colleges
Stewart and Zimmer, College English and Communication
Sabin, Gregg Reference Manuals and Worksheets

Two-thirds of the respondents to the survey (66.2 percent) did not indicate a business English textbook, the reason being that many schools do not offer business English as a separate course.

Grade Level for Basic Business Communication Course

The grade level at which the basic business communication course was most frequently offered by the respondent schools is as follows:

Grade Level	Percent Offering	Type of Institution
Freshman	47.6%	Private Business College/School
Freshman	45.8%	Post-Secondary Vocational School
Sophomore	55.8%	Community/Junior College
Junior	40.4%	Four-Year College/University

Overall, approximately one-third of the schools (30.9 percent) offered basic business communication most frequently at the sophomore level.

Availability of Microcomputers

At the time of the survey, about three-fourths of the schools (72.2 percent) had microcomputers available to the department in which business communication was taught. There were no significant differences among the types of schools as to which ones had microcomputers and which ones did not.

For the Four-Year Colleges/Universities and Community/Junior Colleges, the order of most frequent availability was Apple II, IBM Personal, and Radio Shack TRS-80 Model III. For the Post-Secondary Vocational Schools and Private Business Colleges/Schools, the order was Apple II, Radio Shack, and IBM Personal.

Overall, over half of the schools (55.3 percent) had one or more Apple II, 43.7 percent one or more Radio Shack, 41.2 percent one or more IBM Personal Computer, and 33.8 percent one or more Commodore Pet.

Current Use of Microcomputers in Business Communication Instruction

Over one-third of the schools (35.4 percent) indicated that although microcomputers were available for business communication instruction they were not used for that purpose.

Those using microcomputers used them as follows: 10.8 percent used them for computer assisted instruction, 28.8 percent for word processing/text editing, and 3.7 percent for other purposes. There were no significant differences among the types of schools in the way microcomputers were used in business communication instruction.

Potential Use of Microcomputers in Business Communication Instruction

Over half of the school responses indicated that microcomputers could be used effectively in business communication instruction if appropriate software were available. The use most often selected (60.9 percent) was word processing/text editing. Also, using microcomputers for computer assisted instruction was selected by 51.3 percent. Other uses were indicated by 8.8 percent such as checking spelling, sentence construction, etc. There were no significant differences among the responses of the various types of schools as to how microcomputers could be used in business communication instruction.

Content Emphasis in a First Course in Business Communication

Overall, respondents indicated that in a first course in business communication the most emphasis should be given to communication fundamentals, letters and memos, and report writing. Least emphasis was indicated by the most respondents for communication theory, organizational communication, oral communication, communication technology, and related topics (ethics, nonverbal communication, and intercultural communication).

The Post-Secondary Vocational Schools and Private Business Colleges/Schools placed heaviest emphasis on business English while Community/Junior Colleges and Four-Year Colleges/Universities tended to rate business English lower.

Importance of Instructional Aids

All schools tended to rank the Teacher's Manual as the most important instructional aid.

Over three-fourths of the schools (79.1 percent) ranked the Teacher's Manual as an important or very important instructional aid. The Student Workbook was ranked important or very important by 53.7 percent, Audio-Visual Aids by 59.1 percent, and Microcomputer Software by 42.4 percent.

Four-year Colleges/Schools ranked the importance of Student Workbooks low (only 27.1 percent thought them important or very important), whereas over two-thirds of the other types of schools thought Student Workbooks were important or very important.

Other than the Private Business Schools/Colleges at 43.7 percent, over half of all the other types of schools thought Audio-Visual Aids important or very important. (The range was from 55.9 percent to 69.0 percent).

Post-Secondary Vocational Schools were most interested in Microcomputer Software as an instructional aid. Over half of them (59.3 percent) thought Microcomputer Software was important or very important. About 40 percent of the other types of schools ranked Microcomputer Software as important or very important.

CONCLUSION

Business communication instruction is an extensive offering in post-secondary schools. Whereas there is considerable agreement on the appropriate content emphasis in a first course in business communication, wide variation in instructional materials is evidenced by the more than 100 textbooks used. Microcomputers will play an increasing role in business communication in the future.

SOUTH-WESTERN PUBLISHING CO.

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WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL
DOING IN BUSINESS
COMMUNICATION?

Your advice is needed! The development of new, high-quality learning materials in business communication is one of our top priorities at this time. By sharing information about your school's business communication offerings, you can help determine the direction of our texts in years to come.

You are the only person in your school who has received the enclosed questionnaire. If you need information from other teachers for responses to some of the questions, please consult with them as necessary. If you are not currently teaching business communication and someone else at your school is in a better position to complete the questionnaire, please encourage that person to respond.

To receive a copy of the results of this survey, just include your name and address on the last page of the survey form. Please return the form in the enclosed postage-paid envelope as soon as possible. Information about your school's courses will be counted in the results if we receive your information by December 1.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely

Linda A. Sullivan
College/University Department

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

(1) Please circle the number which represents the title that best describes your school or college.

1 Community/Junior College
2 Four-Year College/University
3 Post-Secondary Vocational School
4 Private Business College/School
5 Other_____

(2) Please circle the number which represents the undergraduate student enrollment at your school or college.

1 Fewer than 2,000
2 2,000 - 4,999
3 5,000 - 9,999
4 10,000 - 14,999
5 15,000 or more

For Questions 3 through 6, please provide information for each communication course that business students at your school/college are required to take or may elect to take:

(3) Business Communication

☐ Required ☐ Elective	Text(s) Used: (Title and author[s]) [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____	Main reasons text(s) selected: [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____
Average Annual Enrollment Last Three Years _____		

(4) Business English

☐ Required ☐ Elective	Text(s) Used: (Title and author[s]) [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____	Main reasons text(s) selected: [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____
Average Annual Enrollment Last Three Years _____		

(5) Other Communication Course (Course Name)_____

☐ Required ☐ Elective	Text(s) Used: (Title and author[s]) [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____	Main reasons text(s) selected: [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____
Average Annual Enrollment Last Three Years _____		

(6) Other Communication Course (Course Name)_____

☐ Required ☐ Elective	Text(s) Used: (Title and author[s]) [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____	Main reasons text(s) selected: [1]_____ [2]_____ [3]_____
Average Annual Enrollment Last Three Years _____		

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(7) Please indicate the grade level at which your school's/college's Basic Business Communication course is most often taken.

1 Freshman
2 Sophomore
3 Junior
4 Senior
5 Not offered as a separate course

For Questions 8 through 12, please indicate the number of microcomputers of each brand which is available to your department.

	Brand	None	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 20	Over 20
(8)	Apple II	1	2	3	4	5
(9)	Commodore 64	1	2	3	4	5
(10)	IBM Personal	1	2	3	4	5
(11)	Radio Shack TRS-80, Model III	1	2	3	4	5
(12)	Other_____	1	2	3	4	5

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(13) If microcomputers are available to your department, please indicate how they are currently being used in business communication instruction. (Please check all that apply.)

/__/ Available, but not used
/__/ Not available
/__/ Used for computer assisted instruction
/__/ Used as word processors/text editors
/__/ Other uses: _____

(14) Please indicate how you think microcomputers could be used effectively in business communication instruction if appropriate software programs were available.

/__/ Could not be used effectively
/__/ Used for computer assisted instruction
/__/ Used as word processors/text editors
/__/ Other uses: _____

For Questions 15 through 24, indicate the percentage of content emphasis that each topic listed should have in a first course in business communication instruction.

	Content Topics	Percent Emphasis
(15)	Communication Theory (information theory, communication process models, behavioral concepts, etc.)	
(16)	Organizational Communication (organizational characteristics, communication flow in organizations, leadership and power, etc.)	
(17)	Communication Fundamentals (writing guides, you-viewpoint, barriers, etc.)	
(18)	Business Letter and Memorandum Writing (good news/bad news letters and memos, employment letters and resumes, etc.)	
(19)	Business Report Writing (research methodology, organization of reports, graphic aids, etc.)	
(20)	Oral Communication (presentation principles, conducting and participating in meetings, dictation, etc.)	
(21)	Business English (grammar, punctuation, mechanics, etc.)	
(22)	Communication Technology (word processing, electronic communication, teleconferencing and videoconferencing, etc.)	
(23)	Related Content Topics (communication ethics, nonverbal communication, intercultural communication, etc.)	
(24)	Other_____	
		100%

PLEASE BE SURE YOUR PERCENTAGES TOTAL 100%

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For Questions 25 through 29, please circle the number which represents the importance of each of the following instructional aids:

Instructional Aids	IMPORTANCE			
	Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
(25) Teacher's Manual (suggested teaching procedures, answers to text questions, test questions, etc.)	1	2	3	4
(26) Student Workbook (review questions, application exercises, blank stationery, etc.)	1	2	3	4
(27) Audio-Visual Aids (transparencies, slides, flip charts, etc.)	1	2	3	4
(28) Microcomputer Software (computer assisted instruction, test questions, application exercises, etc.)	1	2	3	4
(29) Other _____ _____	1	2	3	4

(30) Comments: _____

_____

_____

If you would like to receive a copy of the results of this survey, please complete this section.

Name	Title	Telephone	
College/School			
Address	City	State	Zip Code

NOTE: Please return the completed questionnaire to Mrs. Linda Sullivan, Marketing Manager, College/University Department, South-Western Publishing Company, 5101 Madison Road, Cincinnati, OH 45227. (A postage-paid envelope is enclosed.)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE

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